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DANTE

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DANTE

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DANTE

INTRODUCTION

There are fashions in scholarship as in most human things; long-discarded opinions are apt to be revived despite the evidence of historical documents and the counsel of common sense. In the following pages facts have occasionally been stated, even though they be questioned by some scholars; and the solutions of certain problems have been given without recording the grounds on which such solutions are based. The writer has purposely refrained, owing to the character of this work, from touching upon minute points and from the discussion of facts on which scholars still differ. He wishes, however, to mention that his conclusions have not rashly been reached, and that the opinions set down are those that, rightly or wrongly, he has reached in the course of many years' study.

He has also refrained, so far as possible, from quoting passages from Dante's works, for they are accessible to all in the original and in translations, and the few pages he had at his disposal he preferred to give up to such remarks as might conceivably help his readers in their approach to Dante, an approach that he has endeavoured to render easier by suggesting (in the appendix) a plan intended for readers

in a hurry. By following it one may read the most famous passages in Dante's works, with a fair chance of understanding something about them. More cannot be hoped for by students who are driven by haste; and complete understanding and enjoyment can only be the reward of personal study and reflection.

CHAPTER I

WHILE BEATRICE LIVED

It was a time of exceptionally rapid change in which Dante Alighieri was born. Florence, a little township, had been gaining pre-eminence over neighbouring cities and exercising an increasingly efficient control on the feudal gentry in the countryside. The citizens were deeply religious, proud, and peace-loving—peace-loving in the manner of modern states that find peace more profitable for trade than war, and do not hesitate to wage war on dangerous competitors and on factious neighbours. They fought to secure peace, for they had been toiling hard for more than a century; they had organized their industries, secured markets for their products, and accumulated wealth. Tradesmen became factory-owners and exporters; businessmen became capitalists and bankers, and these financial magnates aspired to a coronet. There were classes and clans in the city; families and clans associated and allied themselves with kindred families and clans in other cities; there were rich parents with social ambitions who married their well-dowered daughters into the aristocracy; well-to-do noblemen who invested their savings in trade, and impoverished noblemen who courted the new rich.

And while society was undergoing such a change, the city-state was involved in larger political issues.

Florence, like the other cities which had risen to comparative freedom from feudal ties, had secured independence by taking sides in the age-long conflicts between the different classes into which feudal society was divided; she had obtained exemptions from her allegiance to the feudal over-lord, and strengthened her position by waging war against such of the feudal noblemen of the district as still claimed to enforce their privileges. In the conflict between popes and emperors, Florence had usually kept on the side of the popes. In 1260, however, the imperial faction of Florence, that had recently been exiled from the city, succeeded in defeating the papal or Guelf faction at Montaperti, and drove the Guelf leaders into exile. This triumph was short lived, for the advent of Charles I. of Anjou, who crushed, in 1266, the heirs of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, caused the Ghibellines of Florence to go into exile and the Guelfs to return. It was then that the commercial element in Florence, goaded by the quarrels and internecine feuds of the noblemen, endeavoured to make sure of internal peace. Between 1282 and 1296 a series of internal reforms were carried out responding to the impact of the different commercial strata on the body politic. From an earlier constitution which concentrated the political power in the hands of financial magnates (*Popolo grasso*), one passed to a constitution based on the trade guilds (Arts), bitterly hostile to the feudal gentry and often hostile also to the well-to-do classes. Some of the noblemen sided with the wildest demagogues in the hope of causing the collapse of the hated constitution

(Ordinances of Justice); all noblemen were interested in its downfall, and some among them obtained the support of Pope Boniface VIII., who aimed at establishing his own over-lordship in Florence.

In 1265, during these complex vicissitudes, Dante was born. He claimed to belong to a noble family of old Roman stock; that his family pertained to the city aristocracy is certain; but it is not certain whether his family is to be identified with the Elisei. Boccaccio suggested it in his invaluable life of Dante, and his statement seems to be confirmed by the Christian name of one of Dante's ancestors. Dante himself has traced his ascendancy back to Cacciaguida (*Par.*, XV., 137-148), who was knighted by Conrad III., and died in the second Crusade. Clearly Dante considered Cacciaguida (born probably in 1091) as the great man of the family. His wife came from the Po Valley, and bore him two sons, Preitenitto and Alighiero, whose name was perpetuated by his descendants. One of Alighiero's sons, Bellincione, had four sons, the youngest of whom, also called Alighiero, was Dante's father. Of the existence and activities of several of Dante's ancestors and relatives, there is documentary evidence, and they appear to have been fairly prominent representatives of a Guelf family. After the battle of Montaperti, several of the clan were forced into exile; Dante's father seems instead to have been allowed to remain in the city, despite his Guelf connexion. He was twice married, once to Bella, who was probably an issue of the noble family of the Abati, and the other time to Lapa, the daughter of a fairly

affluent *popolano,* Chiarissimo Cialuffi. Bella was probably Alighiero's first wife, and certainly Dante's mother. His name, short for Durante, probably repeated the name of his maternal grandparent, Durante di Scolaio degli Abati. Francesco, Gaetana (Tana), the wife of Lapo de' Riccomanni, and an unnamed girl who became the wife of Lione di Poggio were the other issues of these two marriages. A son of Lione di Poggio who was known to Boccaccio was reputed closely to resemble Dante's features.

Such was, then, his familiar environment. While he was growing, the city was rent by internal dissensions, and, despite this, was becoming richer every year. The noblemen of old and new origin resented the social ambitions of the new rich, and tried to suppress them, though they occasionally countenanced them in order to aggrieve a family or a group of families against which they had a feud. Feeling ran high and riots, affrays, and vendettas were frequent.

The accession of wealth was making itself apparent also in the standard of life. Formerly all lived and dressed simply; noble ladies kept within their houses, and there were few festivities to occasion competition in dress and apparel. The development of social ambitions, consequential upon the increase in wealth, brought about an increased display and more complicated and luxurious fashions.

While playing about in the quarter of San Martino, where his family lived, Dante received his first impressions; he would have it that, as early as in his

ninth year, the sight of a girl of the neighbourhood caused him to experience the first thrill of love. It was, at any rate, an incident of whose importance and significance he only later became aware (*Purg.*, XXX., 42). In the meantime, he must have pursued the usual course of studies—learned to write and to read Latin, most likely in a school conducted by Franciscan monks; and it is scarcely to be doubted that he gave signs of his powers (*Purg.*, XXX., 115-117) and of intense religiousness. About his childhood, whether happy and well cared for or gloomy and despondent, so little is known as may be inferred from scant hints in his works, and these hints are often so dubious of interpretation as to puzzle rather than enlighten us. And the earliest recorded event directly concerning Dante is the least expected. In 1277 a betrothal was arranged between him and Gemma, a maiden of the noble Donati family, distantly related to Forese Donati, who was to become the poet's friend, and to Forese's brother, Corso, the future leader of the Guelf faction in Florence. To be engaged to be married at twelve years of age was no uncommon event, and, under ordinary circumstances, the marriage would be delayed a few years, though scarcely so late as 1295, this being the date suggested in the biographies which are based on Boccaccio's account. In the *Vita Nuova*, a work that he completed between 1293 and 1295, Dante told the story of his love for Beatrice and of his courtship of other ladies. It would thus be "nice," according to modern standards, to think that he was at that time still unmarried. It would be nice, but there seems to

be little doubt that after 1295 there were other love incidents in the poet's life, and it should not be overlooked that the poets of his period, no less than the Troubadours, considered it unseemly to mention their wives and their relations, precisely as they avoided paying poetical homage to any but married ladies. Dante, in his turn, never referred to his wife, his parents, his brother, and children. Only once, very vaguely, did he refer to a sister who tended him during an illness (*Vita Nuova,* ch. xxiii.).

His engagement in 1277 could not interfere either with his studies or his amusements. Very early in his teens he began experimenting with poetry, and must have read widely in the lyrics of Tuscany and of Frederick II.'s court, and probably also in the poems of the Troubadours, for, when he was eighteen years old, he felt that he had sufficiently mastered his craft to come out in the open, and he circulated a sonnet containing a riddle which several poets, among them Guido Cavalcanti (d. 1300), endeavoured to solve. Guido was a man of standing, wealth, and learning. He could as easily throw a spear against an enemy for whom he had waited in ambush, compose a delicate lyric, walk about in solitary meditation, and answer a jest by a barbed reply. He had gathered around himself a group of young poets who were attracted, as he was, by the new style of Guido Guinizelli (1230?-1275?), of Bologna. The ladies of their hearts were not to be paid homage in the manner of feudal chivalry as earlier poets had done, but to be exalted as the sources of every noble feeling and action.

It was Guinizelli who had just inaugurated this kind of philosophical lyric, and it was Cavalcanti who further developed it and acclimatized it in Florence. Into such a literary circle Dante was introduced by Cavalcanti, who became his "first friend." And Dante lived the life of a noble youth, attending social functions, paying his court to the ladies, riding out on sportive expeditions, hunting, and taking his place as a cavalryman in the communal army. In the *Vita Nuova* he mentions weddings, funerals, entertainments, however vaguely, just as he hints at country rides which may have been connected with military expeditions of 1286 and 1289. From passages in the *Commedia* and the *Rime* it may be inferred that among his friends were musicians (Casella, *Purg.*, II., Lippo de' Bardi) as well as poets; and that he was familiar with the old and famous Brunetto Latini (1230?-1296), a man of learning and experience, towards whom he felt a filial affection (*Inf.*, XV.). On the whole, his youth was uneventful. Of his having travelled beyond the immediate vicinity of Florence, there is only one possible instance in a suggested visit to Bologna before 1287. When he wrote the prose sections of the *Vita Nuova*, he had made himself acquainted with some books of scholastic philosophy and Aristotle, and read, if not deeply, in some classical authors (Cicero, Boëthius, Ovid, Virgil, and perhaps others). Leonardo Bruni, a fifteenth-century scholar, who could still handle some autograph letters of Dante that have since been lost, assures us that the poet fought in the vanguard at the battle of

Campaldino (June, 1289), which is mentioned in the fifth canto of *Purgatorio;* and he still was in the army during the later operations against Caprona (*Inf.,* XXI., 94 ss.; XXII., 1-9). Apart from this, it is only known that Dante composed a number of lyrics, some of which he later included in the *Vita Nuova* and in the *Convivio,* while the rest, so far as they have been preserved, are grouped together in modern editions under the title of *Rime.*

From the reading of these lyrical compositions it appears that Dante was tireless in his poetical experiments, until he discovered the means of expression best suited to his genius. The craftsman was in him as keen on his art as the poet was inspired. The first lyrics included in the *Vita Nuova* are reminiscent of the riddles and the conventions of the Troubadours; there follow a number of poems in the manner of *Stil Nuovo,* in which the young man quickly achieved a mastery of melodious verse such as Guinizelli and even Cavalcanti could muster but rarely. At this time he seems to have concentrated his attention upon making each single line rhythmically musical and to have kept to this plan also after chapter xix., when he inaugurated his more personal manner (*poesia di loda*).

But who was Beatrice, the lady whom Dante praised in his lyrics? According to his account, he first met her when both were in their ninth year; he saw her again nine years later and fell completely under her charm, so that he could not find peace when far from her, and trembled in her presence. His

love was in danger of being discovered, until he succeeded in diverting attention by paying homage to another lady, and, when she departed from Florence, by choosing yet another screen-lady. This latter affair, however, caused some gossip, and Beatrice, who could never brook anything vulgar, cut him at their next meeting. Such is Dante's account, and, unless the whole story is taken to be allegorical and Beatrice and the other ladies to be fictions of Dante's imagination, as has been suggested by some scholars, it is reasonable to think that Dante must have courted the screen-ladies for their own sake; for there are lyrics among the *Rime* which strongly corroborate such an assumption. It was only later, when he re-lived his early years and was completely under Beatrice's spell, that the other attachments became, in his own recollection, mere incidents of his love for Beatrice, and may have become as distasteful for him to remember, as he wished his readers to consider them unimportant. There is no doubt that from the moment when Beatrice showed her concern for his conduct, he became entirely devoted to her. But Beatrice, pale and lofty, represented for him an unattainable ideal; she was dearer to him because she was out of his reach, and thus the better able to draw from him all that was best and purest in his nature. He sang her praises as if in ecstasy, and described himself as if living in a trance. During an awful dream he had a forewarning of her death, and truly on June 9, 1290, Beatrice passed away. Her death, as recorded in the *Vita Nuova* and recalled by her in *Purg.*, XXX., 124-127, seems proof

positive that she was a real woman, and there are good reasons to hold that she is to be identified with Bice, the daughter of Folco Portinari and the wife of Simone de' Bardi, as Dante's own son, Pietro, and Boccaccio have affirmed. Whoever she was, she was made by the youthful Dante the heroine of one of the sweetest and most moving little books that ever were penned. In the slender framework of a story as evanescent in its contours as the links in his syntax are frail, some extremely fine lyrics seem to acquire a particular value. They do not all reach the same finish in craftsmanship, just as they do not all spring from an equally fresh inspiration; but several among them must ever rank among the masterpieces of lyric poetry. Modern readers are apt to be prejudiced against the *Vita Nuova* because of the extraordinary fashion it enjoyed a few decades ago, and because of the distorting platitudes that past generations have written about it; but once readers come face to face with Dante's work, they cannot fail to be caught by its delicate charm. The poet's feelings were so strong and sincere as not only to find immediate expression in lines of a haunting rhythm, but also to persist in him, so that years later, when between his twenty-seventh and his thirtieth year he was commenting upon the poems he had composed since he was eighteen years old, he was able to recapture his past moods so effectively as to endow his prose account with a power that even his verse did not surpass. It would be sufficient to compare the magnificent canzone " Donna pietosa " with its prose commentary to realize how Dante, several

years later, was able to add telling details to an account that would have appeared to be so perfect as not to allow for improvement. So arresting a work as the *Vita Nuova* would, by itself, have placed its author in the first rank among the poets of Italy; and it is only by an unconscious comparison with his later achievements, that one may trace a certain immaturity or a less forceful originality in his youthful work.

CHAPTER II

STUDIES AND POLITICAL LIFE

The death of Beatrice filled Dante with despair. When the anguish had somewhat subsided, he sought comfort in composing some lyrics lamenting her death, and, about a year later, he was profoundly touched by the sympathy that another lady, the "Donna Gentile," showed to him. In the *Vita Nuova* Dante says merely that this lady gazed compassionately upon him, that he was touched by her looks and somewhat consoled by her compassion. There is never a hint that this lady was anything but a real woman, for whom Dante seems also to have written some among the lyrics excluded from the *Vita Nuova,* and whose name may have been Lisetta. In the *Vita Nuova* Dante was necessarily induced somewhat to idealize the incidents of his own life. He certainly never meant to mislead his readers; but he had come, as will soon be seen, to a turning-point in his life, and, looking back upon earlier events, his mood led him to give prominence to his love for Beatrice and to minimize the significance of such incidents as were not fully consistent with the main lines of his story. It happened, moreover, that, during the period of his sorrow, he found comfort in philosophical study. In *Convivio,* I., 13, he explains how the reading of Boëthius and of Cicero's *De Amicitia* opened out new intellectual horizons to him,

so that he became aware of the consoling power of intellectual pursuits. For thirty months, roughly between June, 1290, and the end of 1292, he gave himself up to reading so assiduously that his eyesight suffered badly. The effect of this intense and prolonged period of philosophical study on Dante's learning and intellectual development cannot be exaggerated; and there is another reason which makes this period important:—his earlier years had been occupied in the acquisition of poetical craftsmanship, in social pursuits and in the usual amusements of a young man of his class; his early reading in the classics cannot have been either profound or extended. At last, while in the thralls of sorrow, he came face to face with the works of the great men of the past, and soon after 1299, for about four or five years, he became so deeply involved in political matters as probably to have less time for purely intellectual pursuits. Later came his wanderings during the exile, and it is difficult to imagine that he was ever enabled to pursue a course of regular reading in any of the places he is supposed to have visited, with the exception of Bologna, Padua, and Paris. But his visit to Paris is far from being above reasonable doubt; his residence at Bologna cannot have lasted more than a few months, and his visits to Padua were probably short. Far from having frequent opportunities for study, Dante must have been constantly harassed by the lack of books. His learning, therefore, a stupendous learning considering the period during which he lived, must have been acquired mainly, if not solely, during

the later years of his residence in Florence. Thanks to a remarkable power of concentration, which was the source of many anecdotes, he was able to read rapidly and never to forget. Such studies must have restored his mental balance after a depression, for which Cavalcanti upbraided him in a sonnet, and probably weaned him from too close an association with Forese Donati, with whom he had exchanged some low jests in the course of a poetical correspondence. An incident that Dante so intensely regretted (*Purg.*, XXIII.) as to cause its importance to be often and absurdly exaggerated as if he had lived the life of a rake.

By this time he was married, and his wife bore him three or perhaps four children. That his marriage was not a happy one, Boccaccio confidently asserted, but his evidence, on a subject in which he was so strongly prejudiced, is scarcely to be taken at its face value, and what is known of Gemma's conduct is inconsistent with Boccaccio's allegations. More important than his family circumstances were his readings and studies, for his outlook was altered by them. It is probably not unreasonable to assume that precisely because his outlook had changed, he was induced to assemble a selection of his youthful lyrics into the *Vita Nuova*. Besides celebrating Beatrice and bringing into prominence his love for her, he wished to prevent the dispersal of his lyrics, for he was well aware that isolated lyrics ran a considerable danger of being forgotten. He felt, moreover, a healthy mistrust of the intelligence of his readers, as if he had a foreboding that his

works were to be subjected in future ages to the interpretative efforts of unqualified commentators with dire results. It also seems probable that the philosophical studies, and maybe the reading of philosophical poems such as those of Guiraut de Bornelh, caused him to outgrow the lyrical style of his earlier period. From the angle of the technical development of his versification, it is possible to determine different stages in his lyrical style. During Beatrice's life he endeavoured to endow every one of his lines with a rhythmical lilt, but he seldom attempted to make the musical phrase extend beyond the limits of a single line. Later, having felt, perhaps, that by such means no further improvement was possible, he was induced to search for more complex harmonies. He mingled short with long lines, particularly in his didactical lyrics, and realizing, perhaps, that this attempt was scarcely successful, he abandoned it in favour of a different manner modelled on the lyrics of Arnaut Daniel (*Purg.* XXVI., 118-120). It was in the style of Arnaut Daniel that he composed, either before or after his exile, the lyrics for the so-called Pietra woman which, in point of craftsmanship, show a perfection that was only surpassed by Dante in the *Commedia*. With the *Vita Nuova* the first chapter of his life was closed, just when intellectual pursuits were arousing in him an enthusiasm almost overpowering and prompting him to compose poems on philosophy. When, later, he endeavoured to piece together his poetical efforts during this second period, encasing them like jewels into a full and learned prose commentary, he naturally viewed the whole of his past

from a different standpoint. It is for this reason that, in the opening chapters of the *Convivio,* the episode of the Donna Gentile is retold with the avowed intention of putting a new interpretation on the earlier account. The Donna Gentile is no longer presented as a real woman, but merely as the symbol of philosophy. The period of philosophical studies coincided with his attachment to this lady and her consoling looks jointly with his studies caused Dante's anguish to be allayed, so that the two incidents became one in his mind, and, when thinking over this period at a distance of some twelve or fourteen years, he believed that he had only cared for the Donna Gentile because in his eyes she appeared to him to be a symbol for philosophy. Dante was now thirty years old; with the responsibilities of a family man. Since 1282, and particularly since the constitution of 1289, political power was vested in the Arts. Only such citizens as were enrolled in the Arts were eligible to offices: all noblemen were debarred from election and had no vote; their economic position was impaired. Some of the city-noblemen, having invested their savings in business, had long since begun to take a share in trade. On the other hand, nobility exercised an attraction on the richer business men; for these financial magnates showed the same social ambitions that the masters of modern finance are evincing in our own days. They wished to acquire land and to be knighted. There were three sections of the nobility—the impoverished landowning nobility, the only partly impoverished house-owning nobility of Florence, and a new nobility arising from the

wealthier classes. Their interests clashed, despite frequent transitions of individuals and families from one group to another, and therefore there were dissensions among them, but, as all these groups were disfranchised by the Ordinances of Justice, they had a negative interest in common. Their wishes were partly met by the decrees of 1295-96, allowing most of the noblemen to obtain the franchise by enrolling their name in one of the Arts, which really amounted to a renunciation of their status in order to acquire the privileges of the middle classes. There was, moreover, another force at work that played an important part in internal dissensions: the middle classes were organized in the Arts, and there were Arts of bankers, of silk merchants, of wool merchants, of bakers and butchers, and so on. It is obvious that the interests of a silk spinner or of a cloth manufacturer are not necessarily identical with the interests of the butchers or the bakers, and, in general, the interests of the exporting Arts did not coincide with interests of the Arts composed of trades-people whose market did not extend beyond the walls of the city. The result was, that the Arts were grouped in either two or three sections, according to the epoch considered. There were the Major Arts, formed by the exporting community, and there were the Minor Arts composed of the smaller shopkeepers and local manufacturers; and occasionally a middle group was formed called the Middle Arts. The formation of capital, an unknown element in early medieval society, thus forced rapid economic reassessments upon the citizens, and such a

crisis, combined with the factious activities of dissatisfied and warlike noblemen, caused a long period of continuous political upheavals in Florence.

Dante belonged to a family of citizen nobility. He was not wealthy, and was by character a conservative; thus he had nothing but scorn for the new rich—the new rich, trade, capital, which brought about great social changes in Florence. When he met Cacciaguida in *Paradiso* he made his ancestor the spokesman of his own personal dislike for the tendencies of contemporary society by contrasting them to the simplicity of the earlier days: "Florence . . . abode in peace, sober and chaste. There was no chain or coronet, nor ladies overdressed, nor girdle more conspicuous than she who wore it. As yet the daughter's birth struck not the father with dismay . . . there were no mansions empty of the household. . . ." (*Par.*, XV., 97-106). There was nothing in contemporary society that pleased Dante. Despite this, when the reform of 1295 made it possible for him, Dante joined one of the Arts, that of Physicians and Apothecaries, and soon he was elected to offices in the administration. The Guelf party was in power at the time, and to it Dante's family traditionally belonged, as the Ghibelline Farinata is made angrily to remind Dante: "Fiercely adverse were *your ancestors* to me and my own ancestors" (*Inf.*, X., 47-48). Owing, however, to the disruptive forces which we have tried to summarize heretofore there was friction within the party. As was inevitable, each group sought support and help from the representatives of powerful families, such as the

Donati, and, if anyone claimed the friendship of the Donatis, an old family of the citizen nobility, he was sure to be confronted by the enmity of the rival family of the Cerchi; the split in the Guelf party was not to be avoided, and it actually became manifest in 1300. It was about 1300 that a new force began to exercise a considerable influence on political events in Florence. When that ambitious man, Cardinal Gaetani, became Pope Boniface VIII., he soon showed signs of his desire to re-establish the political pre-eminence of the Roman Church, reverting to the programme of his great predecessors Gregory VII. and Innocent III. Florence in particular, owing to the will of Countess Matilda of Tuscany, he considered a feudal dependence of the Church; and such a claim he had vaguely expressed on several occasions. When the economic dissensions and the personal feuds were causing friction and bloodshed in Florence, he seized upon the opportunity of directly intervening in the internal affairs of the city; and he had not far to seek for his tools. As is well known, Florentine bankers had taken the lead in finance, and exercised a kind of banking monopoly throughout Western Europe at the end of the thirteenth century; and also the pope's bankers were Florentine. They belonged to the group of the Donati and to the financial circles which did not willingly comply with the decrees that the councils were making, in order to satisfy the Minor and the Middle Arts, for financial magnates, such as were the papal bankers, were obviously interested in a daring foreign policy favouring friendship with such countries

as offered opportunities of profit and of commercial expansions. As a result, some families friendly to the papal bankers, and notably the Donati and their group, joined forces with some noblemen with a view to upsetting the Government and bringing Florence within the immediate sphere of influence of the pope. On the contrary, the party in power were timidly averse to ambitious undertakings, feared the risks implied by foreign ventures, and, being content to keep as close to the Florentine traditions of a simpler age as the new social developments allowed, they meant to resist any external intervention in Florence, whether of pope or emperor. Dante's views coincided with the programme of this party, soon to be known as "White," and when this programme was rendered more definite by the action of Boniface VIII., who was seen to be relentlessly pursuing his object and thereby endangering the independence of Florence, Dante must have given it an increasingly active support, alongside of other members of the "intelligentsia" who were stirred to active participation in political affairs by the national danger. The alliance of the pope with the "Black" faction seemed to threaten the liberties of Florence, and it is only necessary to think of what happened a few years ago when the World War was waged, to realize how natural this intervention of the "intelligentsia" was in this crisis. Dante, who may have listlessly participated in the political life up till 1300, in 1300 became one of the leaders of the "White" party. Boccaccio, as is his wont, dramatises the event. According to him, Dante would

have stood out as *the* political leader in Florence. On the contrary, his name is scarcely mentioned in the contemporary chronicle of Dino Compagni, though the extant minutes of certain councils show that Dante actually took the lead in some important debates consistently opposing the ambitious schemes of the pope and of the Black party.

CHAPTER III

BEFORE AND AFTER THE BANISHMENT

The ascertainable facts about Dante's political life are not many. He belonged to a Council of the Arts between the end of 1295 and the spring of 1296. He also was one of the advisors of the Council of the Arts at the end of 1296, and in June of that year he spoke in the Council of the Hundred about military and political matters. Later he was an ambassador to the neighbouring city of S. Gimignano (May, 1300). In the same year he seems to have visited Rome on the occasion of the Jubilee summoned by Boniface VIII., for in *Inf.*, XVIII., 28-30, Dante refers as an eye-witness to "the means taken by the Romans to pass the people over the bridge, because of the great throng in the year of the Jubilee." In April of that year Florentine citizens were charged with conspiring in favour of the pope, and were prosecuted, despite his intervention and the Bull of May 15. In the wake of the Bull there arrived Cardinal d'Acquasparta, a peacemaker whose mission it was to bring about the triumph of the Black party and the submission of the city to papal supremacy. Just then, between June 15 and August 15, Dante was one of the chief magistrates of the city (Priori): and the new magistrates, in order to maintain peace in the city, at once ordered the leaders of the two factions, White and Black, to

keep within bounds in certain specified places at a considerable distance from Florence; but the Priori who entered office on August 15, when Dante's term of office had expired, showed themselves less cautious. Some of the leaders of the White faction having fallen ill, they all were recalled from exile, and thus Cavalcanti, whom Dante called his "first friend," was able to reach Florence before he died on one of the last days of August. Soon afterwards the alleged peacemaker, Cardinal d'Acquasparta, having been insulted during a riot in September, 1300, chose this riotous meeting as a pretext for his departure in order to make room for a peacemaker of another type, Charles of Valois. The brother of Philip the Fair had, in fact, been summoned to the assistance of the pope, and was already on his way to Florence. The Whites of Florence well understood the danger implied by this intervention; and the minutes of the Councils provide ample evidence of the anxiety with which the new developments were envisaged. It is at this time that Dante seems to have taken the lead. In a letter which L. Bruni read, Dante is reported to have said that all his later troubles arose from his period of office as one of the Priori; but it would rather appear that it was Dante's later action which was taken as a pretext for the charges which were brought against him. Dante spoke, in March of 1301, against the proposal which was made at the direct request of the pope to give military support to the King of Naples in his Sicilian war. In April Dante was one of the advisors of the magistrates of the Arts, and no doubt persisted in his

opposition. Then, after the banishment of the Blacks of Pistoia—a further move towards a breach with the pope—he again spoke in a general meeting of the councils (June 19) against the motion to lend support to the pope. The situation was felt to be so perilous that Dante, on September 13, spoke in favour of the maintenance of the Ordinances of Justice. As no step had been taken to repeal them, his speech must have been prompted by the desire of conciliating all sections of public opinion in Florence. By then Dante was ambassador-elect to the pope, and, together with his two colleagues, he awaited the arrival of the Bolognese and Sienese missions, which were, jointly with the Florentine ambassadors, to proceed to the papal court in order to avert the intervention of Valois. At last, soon after September 28, the mission must have started; and on November 1 Charles of Valois entered Florence at the head of 12,000 men. On the same day two of the Florentine ambassadors returned to Florence to report about the failure of their mission, and to convey the pope's orders to Florence. Dante seems to have been detained at the papal court as a kind of hostage, and he may not have returned to Florence, for as soon as the new Priori were elected, after the revolutionary outbursts of the beginning of November, it was seen that the Black leaders had no intention of sharing power with their foes as had been agreed, but aimed, as the pope had intended from the outset, at suppressing the White opposition. On January 27, 1302, judgment was pronounced on some of the White leaders; together with five others, Dante

was condemned to a heavy fine and to the repayment of certain undefined public moneys with the misapplication of which he was charged, being ordered to present himself before the court in order to justify himself. As he did not appear, on March 10, 1302, he was condemned to death in absence, and thus his exile began. The charge against him was evidently disingenuous; barratry was a comprehensive term by which all sorts of financial dealings could be indicated, and it was probably on Dante's speeches against the proposals to lend money to the pope that the charge was technically based. How bitterly he felt the iniquity of his condemnation and the personal suffering which it entailed, appears from the words by which Cacciaguida is made to prophesy these events in *Paradiso,* c. XVII.: "Thou shalt abandon everything most dearly beloved . . . thou shalt experience how salt tastes another's bread." On another occasion he spoke feelingly of Romeo, who also suffered exile, "and if the world knew the heart he had within, begging his life crust by crust, though it praises him much it would praise him more" (*Par.,* VI., 140-141), and in a famous lyric (*Tre donne intorno al cor*) he proudly asserted that he considered it an honour to have been banished. Where did he go? At first he joined his fellow-exiles, who soon bound themselves together in an association called "The Society of the White Exiles," and, according to Boccaccio, Dante became one of the twelve directors of this "Society." They seem to have stayed first in Siena and then probably in Arezzo. On June 8, 1302, Dante was one of the

signatories of a document by which the Whites took over the lease of a castle that was to be the jumping-off board for their military operations. Their military operations, however, met with little success. The treachery on the part of some of their supporters and the valour of Fulcieri da Calboli, who was in command of the Florentines, caused the exiles to suffer more than one severe reverse. The captain of the White exiles was Scarpetta Ordelaffi of Forlí, and Dante may have spent some time at the court of Scarpetta, thus becoming acquainted with Romagna, a region to which there are continuous references in *Inferno,* and whose noble traditions are celebrated in *Purgatorio* (c. XIV.). Dante may have also gone to Bologna on political missions before 1305, or may have chosen to visit the University there, while waiting for the plans of the exiles to mature. In October, 1303, Pope Boniface, soon after enduring the indignity of an attack on the part of French emissaries, died at Rome "roaring like a lion," as the chronicle says. His successor, a Dominican monk of Treviso, who took the name of Benedict XI., immediately endeavoured to reconcile the two factions of Florence, sending there his trusted counsellor, Cardinal Nicholas of Prato. This mission was welcomed by Dante in a letter that he wrote as spokesman of his fellow-exiles. When their new captain, Alessandro da Romena, died during the summer of 1304, Dante wrote a letter to his brothers excusing himself from attending the funeral, owing to the straits in which he found himself. Soon later he parted from "the vicious and ill

company" (*Par.*, XVII., 52) of the exiles, many of whom refused to suspend military operations pending the Cardinal's mission, as Dante seems to have urged. Cacciaguida announced that Dante would make "a party to himself," and Brunetto Latini forecast that both factions "would have a hunger" of Dante (*Inf.*, XV., 70-71). It was then, probably, during the early summer of 1304, that Dante withdrew from the field, so that he had no part in the battle of Lastra, which took place on July 20, and which resulted in the rout of the Whites. He maintained that he had no reason to blush for this defeat (*Par.*, XVII., 66). By this time he had probably sought the hospitality of Bartolomeo della Scala at Verona, "the great Lombard," who died in the autumn of that year.

So summary an account tells us very little about Dante the thinker and the poet. As a man of action, he cannot be said to have proved successful; are we to suppose that throughout this period, even though he may have lacked the opportunity for continuous application, he entirely refrained from literary activity? He may have composed official letters and acted as an orator for the White exiles, and he may have studied at Bologna; for in his later works he showed more than average familiarity with Roman and ecclesiastical Law, so that lawyers have confidently asserted that he must have spent some time at that university. At the same time his political horizon was broadened; originally his political outlook was centred in Florence, and was necessarily provincial. The exile brought a wider experience by travel and contact with

all sorts of people. The downfall of Florence, as he considered it—we should say the downfall of the White party—had been brought about by the temporal ambitions of Pope Boniface VIII., and Dante, as many other political thinkers had done before him and were doing in his age, was led to meditate on the relations between popes and emperors. On the other hand, just as, during the period of philosophical studies, he had composed didactic and allegorical poems, during the early period of his exile he composed, or planned, other poems in the same strain. From a personal angle, he aimed at establishing his own worthiness. He had become a political man of note, and was, on account of his political views, enduring much hardship; for a time he lost heart and hoped to be readmitted in Florence; "if I sinned," he wrote in the *canzone,* "Tre donne intorno al cor," "several months have passed since my sin was extinguished, if a fault be cancelled by repentance"; but whether he craved for the indulgence of the dominant faction or, having resigned himself to exile, sought the help of men who were in a position to extend some liberality to him, he was necessarily anxious to show himself deserving of respect. He did not wish to be considered a mere songster of love poems. At the same time he had written a number of love lyrics of the literary merit of which he felt certain, though they could have been taken as evidence of passions less seemly in a man of his standing and age. He, therefore, endeavoured to bring allegorical interpretation to bear upon his early love lyrics, and consequently also upon his personal

events. And having composed some purely allegorical lyrics, he planned a work in which he would include and comment fourteen didactic, allegorical and allegorically interpreted lyrics, inspired by some lofty subjects such as justice, beauty, love, nobility, and so on. It has been said that ultimately this work, which he called the *Convivio,* was to be a philosophical encyclopædia of a popular character, intended to bring the benefits of scholastic philosophy within reach of those who had not enough Latin to understand the books in which this philosophy was expounded. Only the introductory book and the commentary of three *canzoni* were, however, completed, so that we have four out of the fifteen books which Dante intended to write. This unfinished work has been described as a failure, and a failure to some extent it was, though it may be hazardous to assume that Dante tired of it because he realized that the work could not prove a success: there probably were other reasons contributing to such a decision. Even as it stands, the *Convivio,* the earliest original treatise in Italian prose, deserves great attention, for it provides the key to many of Dante's ideas and contains passages of great beauty. At the very beginning Dante gives the rules of allegorical interpretation, thus providing later scholars with a key that has been often misused. And in Book I., 10-11, he celebrates the value of the Italian language as a medium of literary expression, of the merits of which he had grown enthusiastically convinced.

The first of the lyrics commented upon in this

treatise was certainly written before Dante left Florence, and concerned his love for the compassionate lady; most of the poems, however, which Dante intended to comment on in the books of *Convivio* which he never wrote down, were composed during his exile. The evidence about the date of the composition of these poems is perhaps of too technical a character to be fully gone into here; it may suffice to say that their complexity of rhythm and the close connexion of meaning and rhythm form a remarkable stage in the development of Dante's craftsmanship from the simple musicality of the *Vita Nuova* to the discovery of the *terza rima,* which was to be the metre of the *Commedia.* We do not know whether Dante had already written all the fourteen lyrics which he intended to comment in the *Convivio,* or whether he proposed to write later such *canzoni* as he had not already by him. Arguing from his practice in composing the *Vita Nuova,* it seems likely that all the fourteen lyrics were written before he started commenting upon them. If so, several of them have been lost. Amid so much that is uncertain, it is at least certain that this treatise was written during the early period of the exile, for it appears from internal evidence that the fourth book was written after March 1306, and before November, 1308, though it be probable that the first books were written before 1306.

In the Book I. of the *Convivio* Dante also mentions that he was writing a treatise on the Italian language (*De vulgari eloquentia*), and it may be asked: When did Dante write these works? Scholars have tried to

follow his wanderings, and have drawn sometimes hazardous conclusions from the topographical references in the *Commedia*. Dante himself, in some way, encouraged such conclusions by stating that he had wandered practically throughout every region of Italy where Italian is spoken (*Conv.*, I., 2). This, however, is clearly an exaggeration. He never travelled south of Rome, and he roamed mainly about Central Italy and the Po Valley. His "first refuge" was at Verona with the "great Lombard" (*Par.*, XVII., 70-71), in which way he designated Bartolomeo della Scala, whose guest he must have been before the end of 1304. Soon after Alboino's accession (1304), who succeeded Bartolomeo, Dante must have left Verona, for there is a slighting remark about Alboino in *Conv.*, IV., 16. He may have spent some time at Bologna, as a tradition has it, for during the composition of *Convivio* he needed easy access to some considerable store of books such as Bologna could provide. Despite this, there are other places which claim attention. From Verona Dante probably visited the Adige Valley and other places of Venetia; he shows himself acquainted with Padua, Treviso, and Trento. For the lord of Treviso, Gherardo da Camino, he had nothing but admiration, and if he was Gherardo's guest for a time, as seems likely, he may have learned there to dislike Padua and the Paduans, whom he blames for treachery and usury (*Purg.*, V., 73; *Inf.*, XVII., 55 ss.), for Gherardo staggered under the weight of his debts to Paduan moneylenders; and Padua, moreover, was the mainstay of anti-imperial-

ism in the North. Dante may have visited Padua from Verona or from Treviso. Of such visits there is a well-established tradition, according to which Dante stayed in Padua while his friend Giotto frescoed the walls of the chapel of the Arena for Enrico Scrovegni, the son of Reginaldo the usurer (*Inf.*, XVII., 64-75). Corroboration has been pointed out in the dantean character of Giotto's allegorical figures in the Arena and in Dante's familiarity with certain dialectal forms of the local vernacular (*De vulgari el.*, I., 9 and 14). At last a document of October, 1306, provides definite information. We learn from it that Dante was the guest of the Malaspina in Lunigiana, and was entrusted by his host with a diplomatic mission.

Before staying in Lunigiana at the courts of Francesco and Moroello Malaspina, Dante had been at work on a treatise on the Italian language (*De vulgari eloquentia*) of outstanding importance for the history of early Italian literature. It is a document that shows, as none could better, the difficulties which the early writers of Italian had to face. Sharply differentiated vernaculars were spoken in the different provinces and in the different cities of Italy; where was a standard to be found for the literary usage? Dante, writing between 1305 and 1306, maintained that no local dialect could be the basis of a literary language. He went so far as to say that no dialect was the basis of the literary languages either in Greece or at Rome; and held that literary languages are the results of the artificial selection of the best elements to be found in

each of the local vernaculars. In order to facilitate this selection for Italians, Dante classified and analyzed the dialects of Italy as they were known to him, and, in so doing, he forecast with notable approximation the classification which was to be made by the philologists of the nineteenth century. In the second of the four books of which the treatise was to be formed, Dante undertook to discuss the approximate style and the technical constitution of Italian lyrical songs. This section provides evidence, if such evidence were necessary, for holding that Dante took a keen interest in the technicalities of versification. Unfortunately, this book, and with it the treatise, was left unfinished; and, as in the case of the *Convivio,* we may ask, Why was it left unfinished? It was a work that must admittedly have been of extraordinary interest to a poet and a scholar such as Dante; but unfinished it was left. The interruption of both the *De vulgari* and the *Convivio* seems to have taken place roughly about the period of Dante's stay with the Malaspina or a little later. About this time he composed the famous *canzone montanina* "Amor, da che convien," which seems to be connected with the love poems for the Pietra woman and so to give evidence of a period of discouragement, such as the *Convivio* exemplifies, and is clearly attested in the *canzone,* "Tre donne intorno al cor." Bruni tells us that after breaking away from his fellow-exiles when he was writing the *Convivio,* Dante felt listless, humble, and desirous of being readmitted in his native city. But this mood did not last long. When did it change, and why?

CHAPTER IV

DURING THE RULE OF HENRY VII.

The reply to this question depends on the evaluation of several direct and indirect fragments of information. According to Boccaccio, something romantic took place at this time. While Dante was staying with the Marquis Malaspina, Dante's wife, rummaging among his papers in Florence, found a rough copy of some poems, and showed the written sheets to a friend of some literary experience, who greatly admiring the content of the manuscript, sent it to the Marquis in order that he should request Dante to complete his work. The sheets sent from Florence contained the first seven cantos of the *Inferno,* according to Boccaccio, who based his statement on a wrong interpretation of the first words of *Inf.,* VIII.: "I say continuing. . . ." All this is scarcely credible. It is hard to believe that the *Commedia,* such as we have it, was begun in Florence previous to Dante's banishment. The feelings by which Dante was fired during the composition of the first cantos of the *Inferno* are not such as he can reasonably be assumed to have nursed while living in Florence before the terrible events that led to his banishment, and, consequently, to his familiarity with other places and different political conditions than those which prevailed in his native city. Other sources tell a different story. There

is a letter of a monk, Ilaro, bearing no date, but purporting to have been written when Dante was on his way to countries beyond the mountains, in which this monk, residing at Corvo, not far from the territory ruled by the Marquis Malaspina, describes the visit of a stranger who was on his way toward a region across the mountains. Later Ilaro learned that the stranger was Dante, the poet, and was given a copy of the first canticle of the *Commedia* with some notes, and the request to hand this manuscript to Uguccione della Faggiuola, the ruler of Lucca. In the course of conversation, Dante is reported, in this letter, to have told the monk that before leaving Florence he had begun a poem on the same subject which was written in Latin, and to have recited the first four lines of this alleged poem. If this story be true, we can only be thankful that Dante was wise enough to change over from Latin to Italian; and, taking these two pieces of information together, it seems reasonable to suppose that before his departure from Florence Dante had conceived his masterpiece, thought about it, or, at any rate, kept steadily to the plan of one day composing such a work. In the last chapter of the *Vita Nuova,* Dante recorded that, as early as 1292, he had a vision of Beatrice in heaven such as he then felt unequal to describe, and it must be admitted that such a statement may well have prompted Boccaccio to believe that the *Commedia* was begun before 1300, for the connexion of that remote vision with the poem is evident. It seems certain, at any rate, that the *Commedia,* as we have it,

was, if not begun, completely recast after Dante's banishment, and that the *Inferno*, as a whole, cannot have been written before 1306. There was a time when the allegorical meaning of the *Commedia* was held to be solely political, as if the centre of Dante's inspiration were purely political. Such a view was no doubt partial as well as exaggerated; but it contained some elements of truth, for political events strongly influenced Dante's intellectual outlook and consequently the *Commedia*. Political matters, however, had, from 1304 to 1308, taken a course contrary to what we may assume to have been Dante's wish. The successor of Boniface VIII., the peace-loving Pope Benedict XI., had died in 1305. The Cardinals found it difficult to agree on the choice of a new pope, and their agreement was rendered more difficult by the extraneous influences that were brought to bear upon some of them. Owing to the complexity of the political situation, the Powers considered it material to the success of their plans to ensure the election of a pope, if not actively in their favour, at least not antagonistic to them. In the end, the King of France, Philip the Fair, won the day; for, after having struck a bargain with him, he made the Archbishop of Bordeaux his nominee and forced his election; thus was Clement V. raised to the papacy, and, in exchange for the royal support, he seems to have undertaken to reside in France, and in other ways to favour certain political schemes that Philip was actively pursuing. It was at first thought that the choice of Avignon as the papal seat was a temporary expedient, and that this "exile of the

Church," as it was called, was destined to cease as soon as political conditions in Italy became settled; but even a temporary exile amazed those who kept in mind the courage with which earlier popes had faced much more perilous situations; for Rome was universally held to have been chosen as the seat of the popes by St. Peter himself; and Dante's distress for such a decision could not be over-emphasized. At the outset some sympathy was extended to the pope, for his decision had been taken under duress, and he seemed to make it his first object to bring about a pacification in Tuscany and elsewhere, and thus to pave the way for his prompt return to the natural seat of the Church. He sent as his legate in Tuscany Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, a man of noble birth and some diplomatic ability, who proved, however, unequal to the task that had been entrusted to him. Far from succeeding in bringing peace between the factions in Florence, he was unable to prevent the Florentine attack upon Pistoia, and, in 1306 after a dramatic siege, Pistoia fell, and, with her independence, there ceased to exist the principal reason for the mission of Cardinal Orsini. In Florence the Black faction had become strongly established; but Corso Donati, who had been mainly responsible for its earlier successes, felt dissatisfied with the results that had been achieved. Corso had always aimed at establishing his personal supremacy in Florence, and he had taken part in factious movements with a view to securing the oppression of his personal enemies. In the crushing of his enemies he had proved completely successful;

but he was never strong enough, despite a considerable following, to establish a personal government. Lastly, when, already well advanced in years and twice a widower, he had married the daughter of Uguccione della Faggiuola, the masterful ruler of Ghibelline Pisa. This wedding caused many of his supporters and all his opponents to ponder, and to realize the danger in which the republican constitution of Florence was placed by Corso's ambition. In October, 1308, during a riot, he was forced to take to flight, and, having fallen from the mule on which he was riding, was done to death (*Purg.*, XXIV., 82-87). Thus—Dante may have thought—the internal pacification of Italy, the one intention that could be put to the credit of Clement V., was stultified by the results; and the poet was led to meditate upon the conditions of this country and upon the causes of so vast and so perilous a political disorder; reaching the conclusion that disorder was the result of inefficient organization, and of the inadequate exercise of power on the part of the supreme authorities. The Middle Ages believed that political authority was vested by divine right in the emperor and the pope; but there was no agreement as to whether the pope depended on the emperor or the emperor on the pope. Before October, 1308, there was no lawful emperor, for the King of the Romans, Albert of Austria, had never travelled to Rome in order to receive the imperial crown. There was a pope, but he was a Frenchman, bound by unconfessable ties to his king; he resided in France, and had deserted the traditional seat of the papacy. And it was due to this

state of political disorder, arising from papal and imperial impotence, that Dante himself had been driven into exile. Thus, his discontent with the political situation was further embittered by loneliness and personal suffering. Long ago he had decided that he would raise to the memory of Beatrice such a monument as had never been raised for any woman. During the days of his philosophical enthusiasm he may, for a time, have thought that the *Convivio* might become such a monument, but there was scarcely any room in the *Convivio* for all the thoughts and the feelings, the despondency, the hope, and the hatred which Dante felt; and again his mind went back to the vision that he had had in 1292. It would be of interest to know what this vision actually was. Did it show Beatrice in glory surrounded by the blessed in heaven or Beatrice seated on the chariot of the Church leading the allegorical procession which Dante described at the end of *Purgatorio,* or did it show something quite different? The conception of the *Commedia* cannot have been sudden; it cannot have come to Dante in a flash; so complex a structure must have been the result of a sustained period of inspiration during which the central parts of the poem by degrees became clear to Dante's mind. He must have defined them to himself, and built around them that wonderfully harmonious edifice, so perfect in its proportions and sublime in its effect. He must have decided upon its general style, its size, and upon the metre to employ. It was to be "popular," and thus to be written in the vernacular language and in a style

not so lofty as that which was, according to Dante, reserved to the lyrical poems—a style which he called "tragic." It was to be written in a "middling" style, "comic," as he called it; and hence came the title of his work *Commedia*. The adjective "divina" was added much later by his enthusiastic admirers. Dante only called his work a "comedy" divided into three parts, each dealing with one of the sections of the Christian after-world—Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Each section was to be described in 33 cantos of approximately equal length. Three was the perfect number, for it was the number of the Trinity which is one and three; 33 cantos in each of the three sections made 99 cantos for the whole work; prefixing an introductory canto to the *Inferno* (1 added to 3 times 33) gave 100 as a result; 100, the square of 10, 10 the square of 3, plus 1. It is not superfluous to insist upon these numerical proportions, for Dante, as other thinkers of the Middle Ages, ascribed cabalistic value to numbers; so much so that he took pains, when writing the *Vita Nuova*, to show the extraordinary coincidences of Beatrice herself with the number 9. For this poem that was to be based on the developments of 3, he chose as metre a verse also based on 3—the *terza rima*, a stanza of three hendecasyllabic lines, rhymed ABA, BCB, that had been hitherto employed only in popular compositions. Dante raised it from this lowly state, and polished its form so as to render it a perfect medium for the expression of his poetical vision. But all this is external, and only concerns the outlines and the proportions of the building

which Dante proposed to erect. He wished to celebrate Beatrice and to lead up to the scene of her triumph. He wished to manifest once again, and more solemnly, his life-long devotion to her. He also desired to show himself worthy by his conduct, and to portray himself as a pilgrim becoming worthy of celebrating so perfect a woman as Beatrice. Consequently, he took as his subject the gradual purification of his soul and the gradual refinement of his intellectual powers. He was a lonely exile, who had endured, and was enduring, great hardships on account of his political views. Hitherto he had occasionally felt humble and distressed; but who had punished him? what was the cause of his banishment? His mood had changed, and he grew convinced that the cause of it had not been his own sin, but the state of political disorder. Far from justifying himself, Dante would sit in judgment upon his fellow-beings, those who were dead and those who were still living, and he would summon the whole of humanity to an anticipated Last Judgment, he, the poor, persecuted, and wandering Florentine exile. No prouder scheme was ever devised, nor more nobly carried out; and in the course of his poem he would not only point out the causes of individual sins and illustrate Aristotelian philosophy, as it had been reconciled with Christianity by the Schoolmen, but he would give his own solution of unsolved philosophical and political problems. He would point out, for instance, what the ultimate cause was of the political situations in which Europe, and Italy in particular, were struggling, and

show why the Church was failing in her mission. And yet, as the Christian Redemption had made it possible for men to rise to heaven, despite original sin, there must be some hope, not only for individual men and women, but for humanity at large, to earn peace on earth, and thus be enabled to live Christian lives and reap heavenly reward. He had thought for a time, at an earlier period, that moral perfection was to be acquired by the unaided efforts of human reason. But so ambitious a thought gave way before a humbler and deeper realization of Christianity. Men by unassisted efforts can only reach to a certain point in intellectual advancement. In order that they may rise above this point to the contemplation of eternal truth and to the comprehension of the mysteries surrounding humanity, divine Grace is necessary. But how was Dante to express so much in a work comparatively so short? He had to describe his own pilgrimage through the after-world and the countless incidents of this perilous journey. He had to converse with souls in Hell, in Purgatory, and in Paradise; to listen to their reminiscences and their explanations; to obtain from them forecasts as to future events; and he had to show how he, Dante, was rendered worthy of the vision of the Holy Trinity and how men could become worthy of heavenly beatitude. He had finally to explain certain philosophical views and to expound a political system ensuring peace on earth; for peace is the necessary condition for Christian concentration on moral development and perfection, and therefore is the necessary premise to the acquisition of heavenly

beatitude. How was he to introduce all this and much more in a structure so compact as he had devised?

It was only possible through the means of a literary device which was frequently employed during the Middle Ages. Long since the books of the Old Testament had been shown symbolically to forecast the events of the New Testament; and classical works written by heathens, in a heathen spirit, and for heathen readers had been allegorically interpreted so as to be understood by Christians to express Christian truth. Dante himself had written allegorical poems having an allegorical besides a literal meaning, and he also had allegorically interpreted some lyrics of his own which originally had none but a literal meaning. In *Convivio,* II., 1, he had maintained that any work may be interpreted as symbolically significant from an ethical standpoint. Such an "ethical" meaning must be looked for by the readers. Often there is in a work some truth clothed as beautiful fable, which will reveal the truth if "allegorically" interpreted; and occasionally, besides the moral and allegorical, a third symbolical meaning is discovered that Dante calls "sopra senso" or "anagogical." It was thus possible for him to write a poem which besides containing a straightforward story to be literally understood, also allegorically expressed some less obvious meaning; the presence of a literal signification was essential according to Dante, who did not approve of purely allegorical works. A clear, solid, moving story was the necessary framework in which a symbolical signification could be expressed. Therefore, he planned to

write a story, the general outline of which could also allow of an allegorical interpretation, and some episodes of which could yield other meanings when allegorically, morally, or anagogically interpreted. The plan of describing a pilgrimage through the Christian after-world was, of course, not original in itself—Virgil, his chosen master, had led Æneas, his hero, to the heathen after-world, and there were many mystic visions, from the *Visio Sci. Pauli* in the fourth century, to Brendan's *Navigatio,* and to the *Arbor Vitæ crucifixæ,* in which either hell or heaven were described, saints were carried away by miraculous means and shown the sufferings that sinners endured, or the heavenly and physical pleasures that the blessed enjoyed. But such descriptions were monotonous and clumsy, and they seldom possessed any artistic merit; penalties and rewards were set down in a haphazard confusion. Moreover, in many a church of his own days, above the entrance, the Last Judgment was frescoed—the Last Judgment in which were seen theories of saints with hands raised in prayer on one side, and as a counterpart, sinners in hell burnt, beaten, cut to pieces or devoured by Lucifer and his assistants. There was nothing unusual, therefore, in Dante's plan. What is unexpected and quite unparalleled is the art with which this pilgrimage is described. A modern critic has called the *Commedia* a theological novel containing a series of lyrical episodes, meaning by this that the general structure of the *Commedia* is of no literary interest; but the same critic recognized that the number of "lyrical

episodes of outstanding poetical merit is stupendous. It is precisely owing to this amazing power of dramatization that there is practically no canto of the *Commedia* in which one or more touching episodes are not so described as to move the least susceptible reader. Dante spoke of the *Commedia* (*Par.*, XXV., 1) as of "the sacred poem to which heaven and earth have set hand, and which has made *him* lean through many a year," thus showing that he was fully aware of the greatness of his own work.

We have so far assumed that the *Commedia* was begun some time about 1305-06. It is well, however, to point out that scholars differ, and some believe that, however long the period of preparation may have been, Dante did not begin the writing of the *Commedia* until after the death of Henry VII. in 1313; and that he sought comfort in his work when every hope in the realization of his political views had been crushed. If this was so, Dante refrained from poetical activity during the best of his virile age and composed the *Commedia* in seven or eight years, so that seven or eight years of feverish activity would have succeeded to some six or seven years of barrenness, almost complete. This seems unlikely, and the mere fact that Dante broke off the *De Vulgari eloquentia* and the *Convivio* about the same time, renders it *a priori* probable that this interruption was brought about by his concentrating upon a different and grander scheme. Tradition and Boccaccio's authority, never to be lightly discarded, are also against the later date. And, finally, it has been pointed out that, with

one or two exceptions that can be easily explained, the average dates of the historical references in the different sections of the poem seem to progress from the beginning to the end of the *Commedia,* so that, with one exception, there is no reference in *Inferno* later than 1302 or 1303; there is no reference in *Purgatorio* to any event later than 1308, and no reference in *Paradiso* to events later than 1316. The sum total of these and other lines of argument makes it probable than Dante began the *Commedia* during the early years of his exile; and it has also been suggested, with some probability, that the *Inferno* may have been completed by 1308, the *Purgatorio* by 1313, and the *Paradiso* in 1321. If these dates be correct, it would follow that the actions of Boniface VIII., the election of Clement V. and its consequences, together with trouble in Florence, were the political facts which stirred Dante, and promoted him to the writing of the *Commedia.* In the *Commedia,* however, the emperor and the idea of empire have a great part. When Dante was banished there was no crowned emperor. On May 1, 1308, the emperor-elect, Albert of Austria, was murdered by his nephew, and the colourless and powerless Henry, Count of Luxembourg, was chosen as his successor. Henry had no army, little money, and scant experience; he was, however, a good and pious man, swayed by lofty ideals. The majesty of imperial authority filled him with awe; and his exalted conception of the sacredness of his office made him feel bound to work hand-in-hand with the pope in the interest of universal peace. Henry was

elected in November, 1308; in January, 1309, he received the crown of King of the Romans at Aix-la-Chapelle and took the name of Henry VII. A letter in which he expressed his intentions was answered by the pope in a dignified tone of congratulation; and the rumour rapidly spread that the emperor was minded to pursue a peaceful and idealistic policy. The election of an emperor ever aroused hope among those who were dissatisfied with the existing conditions. On this occasion the emperor definitely announced that he meant to put an end to political factions, and hopes soared higher than ever, and were turned into a frenzy of expectation when, in May, 1310, Henry VII. intimated that he would proceed immediately to Italy in order to pacify the country and receive the imperial coronation at Rome. This was going a little too fast for Clement V., and particularly for his royal supporter and master. If the pope was lukewarm, the Italians were growing enthusiastic. At last there was a peace-loving emperor, who did not consider it of little importance to be crowned in Rome and to suppress political feuds. The factions in power in the different cities, the Blacks of Florence, the Della Torre of Milan, and so on, were naturally less enthusiastic. Peace was only desirable to them in so far as it would check the political attempts of their opponents who were either oppressed or banished. If peace instead were to mean that they should have to surrender some part of their political power, and share it with their opponents, they would have to consider their position. For the exiles, on the other hand, peace meant justice,

and justice their reinstatement in their former positions, and consequently the punishment of their enemies. The emperor was soon harassed by gratulatory missions and messages equally enthusiastic, whether coming from hopeful exiles or wary representatives of ruling factions. Only Florence showed her uncompromising antagonism to pacification, for pacification entailed the readmission of the White exiles. On October 30, 1310, the emperor crossed the Alps, and soon he became involved in the dissensions of the Italian cities. To express the intention of bringing peace was incomparably easier than to enforce pacification. In such a task even a prince of proven ability and possessed of a powerful army would have probably failed; and Henry VII., who was rather well meaning than astute, found himself surrounded in Italy by a whole crowd of crafty and unscrupulous men, who either were anxious not to lose such advantages as they possessed or craved for revenge. No wonder, then, if in Milan Henry VII. was hoodwinked by Matteo Visconti and made the tool of partisan plots. Consequently, if the enthusiasm of the idealists did not abate, the help which the constituted governments gave to the emperor was lukewarm and conditional.

Where was Dante? According to Boccaccio, after having left the court of the Malaspina, he visited Paris, and gave proof there of his extraordinary debating powers in some public discussions. It is quite probable that Dante may have felt the need of further philosophical study in view of the difficult subjects with

which he had to deal in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and Paris may have attracted him. On the other hand, his recollection of French events and places, if he went there, appears to be so scant that even those who accept this tradition suppose that he did not stay long in Paris. Wherever Dante was, when the news reached him that Henry VII. was actually marching towards Italy, he must have approached the emperor, and he certainly paid personal homage to the sovereign. He expressed his enthusiasm in an eloquent letter addressed to the princes of Italy (September or October, 1310), which is so worded as to make it certain that his political views had, by then, taken the final form, which is known to us from the *Commedia*. When he realized that the opposition of the Florentines to Henry VII. was irreducible, he addressed an outspoken letter to his fellow-citizens, urging them to submission and reminding them of the penalties that previous emperors had inflicted upon rebels. Soon afterwards, on April 17, he ventured to write to the emperor himself, pointing out the error of fighting local opposition in Lombardy, for the mainstay of the opposition was Florence. We know now from documentary evidence that Dante's view was fully justified; for it was Florence that aroused enemies to the emperor in the Po Valley; and it was Florence that endeavoured to shake the King of Naples out of his military inactivity.

This letter, being dated as if proceeding from the neighbourhood of the source of the Arno, tells us where Dante was staying, probably at Porciano, as

the guest of the Count Battifolle, if we accept the evidence of three complimentary letters addressed by the Countess Battifolle to the Empress Margaret, which are reasonably supposed to have been written by him. Meanwhile, the emperor, having proved victorious in the north, proceeded south, took up residence in Pisa, placed Florence under the imperial ban, and finally decided upon his journey to Rome, where, on January 29, 1312, he received the imperial Crown, not from the pope, who had not stirred from Avignon, and not willingly from his legates, for the two cardinals had been sent to Rome with the mission to hinder, rather than to perform, the ceremony; and they were supported by the Neapolitan troops. As a result, the emperor only succeeded after a prolonged fight in entering the church of S. Giovanni Laterano, and the cardinals could only be induced to impose the crown upon him by the threats of the populace. Hastily returning from Rome, Henry VII. marched on Florence, besieged it, but was unable to overcome the resistance of the town, so that his position was weakened, and he withdrew to Pisa. Having at last realized that Robert of Anjou intended to resist the imperial claims, Henry announced his intention to put Robert under the ban and to march against Naples. Here was the opportunity for the pope to unmask his position, for the Kingdom of Naples was considered a feudal dependency of the Church; so that Clement threatened the highest spiritual condemnation against the emperor should he move against Robert. While Henry remained at Pisa and was gathering troops

for his attack on Naples, and while lawyers and pamphleteers debated the legal position of the contending parties, on August 24, 1313, the emperor died. Dante had himself taken part in this political discussion by writing a Latin treatise (*Monarchia*), which is of pre-eminent importance for the understanding of his political opinions. Boccaccio held this treatise to have been written about this time; there have been scholars, however, who have maintained either that it was written in Florence before Dante's exile, during the last days of Dante's life, at any rate, after 1318, or that the first two books were written in Florence, and that the third book was written after 1318. Despite these conflicting views, there are good reasons for holding that the *Monarchia* was composed during the first months of 1313; and it seems probable that Dante lacked the opportunity of circulating his work owing to Henry's death. Dante's object was to raise the discussion from a legal on to a philosophical plane; he consequently considered in the first book the reasons of political organization in general. Political organization is required by human society because, after the original sin, isolated men would not be in a condition to reach moral perfection, and thus to become eligible to heavenly beatitude. In order to obtain peace on earth, there must be a supreme temporal authority which, being supreme, is immune from desires and above all factions—an authority which is eminently just and is powerful enough to enforce justice upon the unwilling. In the second book he endeavours to trace and to analyze the historical development of

imperial authority from the Roman Empire, the legitimacy of which was rendered manifest by many miraculous events due to divine intervention, and by Jesus Christ choosing to be sentenced by a Roman magistrate. In the last and most important book, he considered the mutual relations of popes and emperors and the sources of their authority. These relations had been symbolically expressed during the Middle Ages, and compared to those between the moon and the sun, the sun standing for the pope or the emperor, according to the case. Dante wished to prove that the temporal power of the pope was fully illegitimate. He had no doubts as to the reality of the donation of Constantine, but he considered it void, for the emperor had no right to give away what was merely vested in him as emperor, and was not a personal property. He considered, moreover, void also the donation of Charlemagne, for no right can arise from an illegal action (*usurpatio iuris non facit ius*), and he concluded that both the emperor and the pope were directly depending on God and independent of one another; that the emperor, as representative of temporal power, owed a certain respect to the pope, who represented spiritual authority. His treatise, written in a forceful and personal style, did not touch upon practical politics, for Dante was satisfied with having shown the universal principles and the philosophical grounds on which the claims of such an emperor as Henry VII. were based. Henry VII., however, was dead.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST YEARS

The death of Henry VII. caused all Dante's hopes to crumble; justice was not yet to rule the world; not yet was Dante's banishment to end. For a time Dante remained in Tuscany. The *Purgatorio* he had finished or was finishing writing—a canticle that is filled with a strong feeling of hopefulness, as if the poet were convinced that his political ideals and his aspirations were on the point of being realized. With Henry's death the coming of the Avenger and the redress of the all-pervading evils were delayed for a number of years. Dante himself must have been at a loss for a forecast as to the date of the coming of another Avenger. His heart was sore, but his will and his pride were undaunted. So much so that when Pope Clement V. died, in April, 1314, and the cardinals assembled in order to elect his successor, amid conflicting influences, Dante did not feel any qualms at addressing an outspoken letter to the cardinals in conclave urging them to consider the needs of the Church. The King of France exercised great pressure in order to ensure the election of a pope of his liking, while some of the cardinals wished to break away from French influence. In the end the king had his wish, and the new pope, John XXII., was a Frenchman. But this result was only achieved, after unseemly riots, in August, 1316. Thus, for about two years there

was no pope, as there was no emperor, and one has only to think of the importance which Dante gave to the active fulfilment of their duties on the part of the emperors and popes, to imagine with what distress he must have considered the situation. Perhaps he drew some consolation from the rise of Uguccione della Faggiuola, an adventurous soldier who had made himself the master of Lucca and Pisa, and had acquired a pre-eminent position in Tuscany, claiming to be the representative of Ghibelline ideals. Dante was possibly at Lucca when he received a communication of some importance. Uguccione was threatening the independence of Florence, and Florence, realizing the danger, offered to recall such of the exiles as would pay a fine and march through the town with their heads covered with ashes and a sword hanging from their necks. Dante was informed in May, 1315, of this offer, by a friend, and to him Dante replied, between May 22 and May 30, a noble letter in which he renounced the hope of ever setting foot in Florence again if his return was not obtainable by means less degrading. "What," he concluded, "can I not anywhere gaze upon the face of the sun and the stars? Can I not under any sky contemplate the most precious Truths without I first return to Florence, disgraced, nay dishonoured, in the eyes of my fellow-citizens? Assuredly bread will not fail me." (Toynbee's rendering.) Soon later Dante probably proceeded to Verona, where Cangrande della Scala, the young and magnificent ruler, was then standing out as a chief representative of imperial interests and the most powerful prince in

Northern Italy. His brother Alboino had died since 1311, and there was no reason, therefore, for Dante to keep away from the court in which he had found his first refuge in 1304. Cangrande was fond of keeping an open court, and poets, artists, and jesters flocked to it, as well as exiles and adventurers; and Dante nursed the warmest feelings of gratitude and admiration for him throughout his remaining years. It is not known with certainty how long Dante resided at Verona; it is known, however, that about 1318-19 he sent a most important letter to Cangrande, dedicating the *Paradiso* to him, and accompanying the first cantos of that canticle. In this letter Dante shows how he wished the poem to be understood and interpreted, and wrote himself a full explanation of the first lines of canto I., laying particular stress upon the interpretation of the allegorical meaning. It may also be suggested on reasonable grounds that Dante, who had possibly been unable to circulate the *Monarchia* owing to Henry's untimely death, offered also this treatise to Cangrande as a token of his admiration and as a return for the favours that he had received, and may still have hoped to receive, from Cangrande. From Verona Dante migrated to Ravenna, but it is difficult to decide whether he left Verona in 1316, 1317, 1318, or 1319. Possibly his visits to Ravenna were several, and after having taken up his abode there, he occasionally returned to Verona. Of one of these visits there is documentary evidence, for, in publishing a little treatise (*Quæstio de aqua et terra*) embodying the subject-matter of a lecture de-

livered by him at Verona, he stated that it arose from a lecture that he delivered before the clergy of Verona in the chapel of St. Helena on Sunday, January 20, 1320 (*Quæstio*, § 24). From about 1318, if not before, it is certain that Dante made Ravenna his home. The lord of the place, Guido da Polenta, a nephew of Francesca da Rimini (*Inf.*, V.), was kindly disposed towards poets, and at his little court he could offer a tranquil refuge to his guest wherein to bring to an end the third canticle of the *Commedia*. Dante may have also taken an interest in the newly established schools of Ravenna, and, according to some scholars, may have taken part in the teaching. At Ravenna, Dante was able to make a home for his children. That his wife followed him there is nowhere stated. His sons, Pietro and Jacopo, were with him, and were the recipients of ecclesiastical benefices at Verona and Ravenna, and a daughter of his (possibly Antonia) entered the Dominican Order there (after 1332?) under the significant name of Sister Beatrice. In 1350 she was visited by Boccaccio, who conveyed to her a gift of money. Besides the comfort of a home, Dante enjoyed the company of friends, among whom one was especially dear to him—a young man, Dino Perini, who hailed from Florence. Another of his friends was the notary Pier Giardini with whom Boccaccio conversed, learning from him some precious details about Dante's last years. On concluding the *Vita Nuova*, Dante had said that he would have died happy if it were granted to him to live long enough to complete that monument to Beatrice which he was intending to raise

to her. And his wish was granted to him to the full, for in 1320 he mentioned to G. del Virgilio the *Paradiso,* as still unpublished and probably unfinished, and even at his death in September, 1321, the last cantos were missing; and, according to Boccaccio, who gave Giardini as his authority, only eight months after Dante's death his son, Jacopo, had a dream, during which it was revealed to him that the last thirteen cantos were to be found in a little niche in the wall where Dante had concealed the last sheets of his manuscript. The ageing poet, who had given up hope to see during his lifetime the realization of his political ideals, of seeing an emperor and a pope in Rome, had developed a wish for an earthly honour which could be bestowed on him, and of which he felt himself fully deserving. In 1315, the city of Padua had rewarded her poet, Albertino Mussato, with the poetical laurels. Why should Dante not adorn his head with the same laurels? His wish must have become known to some of Dante's admirers and friends. So much so that during the last months of 1319 a Paduan who taught at Bologna, a man of considerable repute, addressed a Latin poem to Dante, inviting him to migrate to Bologna, where they might together discourse about the glories of Latin poetry, and where Dante, if he composed an epic poem, in Latin, might be solemnly granted the poetical coronation. Dante was touched by the homage, and sent a Latin eclogue in reply, reviving a form of poetry that had had but few, and, at that time, unknown, imitators during the Middle Ages. He owned his dream of receiving

the laurels in Florence and for the *Commedia,* and added that instead of an epic poem he might compose ten eclogues. Giovanni having repeated his invitation in his turn in an eclogue, Dante replied in a poem written in the same metre and the same strain as his first. Although it is impossible to discuss here other interesting points connected with this correspondence, it is necessary to note Dante's admission in 1320, that the poetical coronation would have given him pleasure, for the beginning of *Par.,* XXV., he appears to have written in a similar mood, and having given up hope of receiving the poetical laurels from men in this world, he proudly chose to imagine himself examined on the most difficult points of theology by St. Peter, and approved in the Court of Heaven. This was, perhaps, Dante's last disappointment. During the summer of 1321 his host, Guido da Polenta, was troubled by the hostility of Venice, and Dante was sent as an ambassador to that city. On his return journey he contracted an illness of which he died between September 13 and 14. He was buried at Ravenna, where he was solemnly interred, his host reciting a funeral oration. A poet of Romagna announced Dante's death in a sonnet, and many of the poets of the age tried, not always infelicitously, to give expression to their grief at the loss of their "sweet master, the unrivalled author, Dante Alighieri."

It is no doubt difficult fully to appreciate the significance of Dante's works unless they are envisaged on their natural background—the political conditions

of his days and the events of his life. But we are so far removed from Dante's age that the poet really lives in his works alone. It requires an intellectual effort to imagine the political events, the economic struggles, the feuds and the friendships in which Dante was concerned, whilst, on the contrary, the works of his genius are with us, and we may establish a connexion with the highest of his gifts by the mere effort of understanding what he wrote, or, more readily still, by allowing ourselves to be swept away by the attraction and power of his poetry. The *Rime* and the *Vita Nuova* give evidence of his immature efforts at imitation, of his proficiency in the poetry of *Stil nuovo,* and of his own *poesia di loda.* After such achievements he was already to be considered the equal of any Italian poet before him; but he aimed higher and never ceased in his ambitious attempts—attempts at a new lyrical style, at a technical improvement of his own lyrical manner, and at acquiring a philosophical learning: attempts, also, at writing didactic and allegorical lyrics on philosophical subjects with a view to discovering the best means by which he could celebrate the memory of that one woman who had been, and was to be, the source of his poetic inspiration. While he thought these efforts successful, he planned to link up his allegorical lyrics by the prose commentary of the *Convivio.* At the same time, the craftsman, who kept up with the philosopher and with the poet in him, could not refrain from revealing to the world the secrets of poetical technique that he thought he had discovered, and thus he began to write

the *De vulgari eloquentia,* and all the time his mind was taken up by philosophical meditation and by reflections on the political conditions of Italy. He saw the evils and the vices of the world, and he was led to trace their cause, as far as individual men were concerned, in the departure from Christian ideals of conduct; men who had not lived a Christian life could not bring into existence a Christian society. Hence, individual sins and individual vices were reflected, and, in fact, multiplied, in society. On the other hand, social disorganization had a further source in the lack of peace. Only men who have lived through days of political agitation and war can fully realize the benefits of peace, and Dante, who was born at a period of devastating factions, and who had to suffer throughout his life from the consequences of political strife, seems to have been obsessed by the idea of peace. A river running into the sea is described by him as "seeking peace." If the story is true, when he turned up at the monastery of Corvo, to the monk who inquired what he was asking for, he replied one word only, "Peace." Peace was one of the qualities of heavenly beatitude, and thus he was led to analyze the causes which rendered peace unobtainable. Political disorganization, which meant the decadence of the political powers, he came to consider as one of the main obstacles to peace. Why was this? There had been days, as Dante firmly believed, when the old order prevailed, when the emperor resided in Italy, when the general conditions in Florence were safe and happy, though men were poor and simple-living. Now, on the contrary, wealth

had brought about luxury, and luxury vice. It is in this strain that Dante made his ancestor Cacciaguida speak to him in *Paradiso:* The old order would not have passed away, if the supreme powers of human society had not come into conflict with one another; the popes encroaching upon the privileges of the emperors, the emperors failing in their duties towards Italy and Rome—emperors who were absent, and thus virtually inexistent. The conviction grew upon Dante that the existence of a supremely just emperor was necessary for the welfare of Christian society, and if it was necessary it could not fail to be, for God would not condemn humanity to perpetual disorder. It was this conviction that led Dante confidently to forecast the advent of an avenging *Veltro,* who would drive off individual vices by removing their causes. These political views were expounded by Dante in his *Monarchia;* but this treatise did not deal with some of the more general causes of the prevailing disorder. The advancement of individuals and of society to such perfection as is obtainable in this world is not to be secured by a purely rational effort: the emperors as well as the popes were God's representatives on earth, and their co-existence and collaboration were required to bring about the conditions in which the individual attainment of spiritual perfection was possible. Healthy social conditions and good government, the fulfilment of their duties on the part of popes and emperors, would not necessitate virtue among men; men would only be thus placed in the conditions in which a virtuous life is rendered less arduous. Men

have divine and human laws for their guidance. These are sufficient as long as men do not depart from the path of virtue, but, when they fall into sin, they cannot retrieve their steps without the direct assistance of Divine Grace. This aspect of his Christian belief Dante wished to express allegorically in his poem. The pilgrimage that he described in the *Commedia* was to be understood as an allegory of the progress of men and society towards perfection. But the pilgrimage was Dante Alighieri's pilgrimage, and Dante undertook it with his own memories and hopes, his own ambitions, and his own good and bad qualities, with all that part of common humanity with which he was endowed. Nevertheless, if the Dante who undertook the pilgrimage, is the man Dante who is also made to suffer during his journey the penalties inflicted for certain sins, the poet who describes it, is the righteous Dante who has already completed the pilgrimage, who has had the vision of Beatrice, and who has been led by her into the presence of Christ seated in glory, after having been examined and approved by St. Peter, so that his own pilgrimage and progress towards perfection became a judgment to which the whole of humanity was summoned. And it was Dante Alighieri, the man who had been driven into exile and who had lived in such straits, who turned himself into a supreme judge and without divesting himself of any of his feelings of love or hatred, took his revenge by sentencing to everlasting punishment men who had long enjoyed fame and living men in great positions. In the course of his progress through Hell, Purgatory,

and Paradise, he met all sorts of sinners, penants and blessed, and he described his meetings with some among them in a series of dramatic episodes standing out on the background of wonderful landscapes, rocks, flames, storms, burning cities, frozen plains, woods, meadows, mountains and the indescribable heavens. It is an almost breathless sequence from the meeting with the wild beasts to the vision of the Holy Trinity. There is Francesca of Rimini, who tells the manner of her own and Paolo's death, and there are the haughty Farinata proudly calling his patriotic deeds, and Dante's respected friend Latini forecasting Dante's banishment. Pope Nicolas III. announces the doom of Boniface VIII. and Clement V., Ulysses reveals the mystery of his own end, Count Ugolino the anguish of his last days. These apparent revelations are among the miracles of Dante's art, for he has succeeded in endowing them with a reality more real than truth. Dante could no more know how Francesca and Paolo sinned, Ulysses sailed on his foolhardy venture, or what Ugolino felt in his prison than we know the feelings of the criminals or the circumstances of undetected crimes and tragic ventures about which we read in the papers. But he saw and re-lived in his imagination the events to which he refers so vividly, that the readers cannot resist the masterful tyranny of the poet and yield credence to him despite the warnings and comments of learned annotators. The same happens with regard to the date. It is superfluous to recall that the poet chose a precise date for his imaginary journey and took great trouble to establish

and illustrate it by historical and astronomical data. He is supposed to have got lost in the forest on Good Friday of the year 1300 and to have completed his journey on April 14. Thus, all the events which had taken place after April 14, 1300, and before the moment of his writing, Dante was forced to bring in as forecasts, and he added to the dramatic possibilities of his meetings with the spirits of the dead by endowing the sinners of Hell with a more or less clear vision of the future and of the past, even though they were deprived of all knowledge of the present, while the souls passing through Purgatory knew more, and the Blessed saw and knew everything because everything was revealed to them by the vision of God. So successful is Dante's art in corroborating this assumed date by unexpected devices that readers, however forewarned, are often misled.

From the ghastly stories of the *Inferno* one passes to the series of poignant episodes in the *Purgatorio,* some of which enable us to become familiar with Dante's literary likes and dislikes. There is his friend Casella, who sings one of Dante's *canzoni* in the *Anti-Purgatorio;* then the representative of the old Tuscan school, Bonagiunta, with whom Dante discusses the developments of lyrical poetry; and there is Guinizelli whom Dante greets as his master. Later there comes the apparition of Beatrice and the pregnant procession of the Church; and there the occasion is found to condemn the policy of Philip the Fair, whose actions had already been blamed by his ancestor, Hugh Capet. And, finally,

in some of the most beautiful passages of the *Paradiso* Dante celebrated the stories of the saints and celebrated himself. He sung the nobility of his lineage by bringing forward his crusading ancestor, Cacciaguida; and he extolled the unparalleled greatness of his own genius by describing himself as worthy of being, not only examined, but praised by St. Peter. Thus the whole of humanity with all its feelings seem to have gone to the making of the *Commedia;* and the whole of humanity and all human feelings are seen and expressed, modified, and enlivened by passing through Dante's mind and they are illumined by his learning; for the sinners in the *Inferno* are distributed according to Aristotelian schemes; the souls of the *Purgatorio* cleanse themselves of the consequences of their sins, which are measured by standards based on a complex theory of love; and the blessed appear in the heavens, which are constructed in accordance with a complete cosmogony, and set in motion by angelic beings whose hierarchy is based on the evidence of theological authorities. No wonder that when Dante died the poets of Italy, great and small, raised a chorus of lamentation, for they did not fail to recognize where Dante's greatness was particularly manifested. His great work was the *Commedia,* and they knew it. On his sepulchre he was described as Dante "the theologian." The *Commedia* is a work so varied and so personal, so dramatic and uplifting, that contemporaries were at once aware that it was one of the literary masterpieces of mankind. In the course of centuries the variation of literary tastes may have

brought about periods during which Dante's greatness was less openly recognized, but among the people his fame was never obscured, until our days when the *Commedia* has been translated into practically every language of the world, and is being read and commented by all who lay any claim to being considered men of literary taste.

APPENDIX

ON READING DANTE

It has been said that Shakespeare's personality escapes his readers, for he has been able to give expression to every human sentiment without ever revealing his own self. Dante's personality, on the contrary, is the centre of interest in all his works. Shakespeare is aloof and omniscient by intuition; Dante is self-assertive and miraculously learned. It may not be necessary to read all that Shakespeare has written in order to realize the compelling power of his genius, but he would greatly be daring who ventured to suggest as much about Dante. Not that all his works are of equal merit, for it cannot be denied that there are passages even in the *Commedia,* his masterpiece, that would not be quoted as evidence of the heights to which his genius would soar, and it has been authoritatively urged that there are sections of the *Commedia* and of his other works that may be considered to possess a scholarly rather than a literary value. If this be true, it would be logical to suggest a few passages out of Dante's works as adequate examples of his art, leaving the task of grappling with the difficulties of the *Commedia* and the other works to the specialists and the enthusiasts.

One who is just entering upon the unforgettable

experience of making himself acquainted with the great Florentine would be well advised to read Dante, and not to read about him. Or rather, I should suggest, to read just enough about Dante as to understand, so far as is possible to him, what Dante wrote and what his ablest commentators have set down in explanation of his words. Entirely to do without notes would not be advisable, for only a few medievalists of wide learning could hope to understand all Dante's historical allusions and philosophical discussions without the assistance of commentaries and without reference to some account of the main events of his life.

As it has already been remarked, Dante's works are aspects of his life, and every word in them is more readily understood when it is connected with the personal experience by which it was prompted. Thus, if the inexperienced readers may reasonably ask the specialists for guidance as to the works and sections of works which rank first for literary merit and call for the closest attention, the specialists are fully justified in feeling distressed by such a request; for they have acquired so intimate a familiarity with Dante's works and the events of his life that every line and every word of his becomes material to them as illustrating the meaning of some passage or clearing up some particular incident. And thus to the Dantist not only everything that Dante wrote is of pre-eminent importance, but the loss of such works of his as may not have reached us, is deeply grieved. Each of his works is so closely knit together, and each work is so evidently dependent upon the incidents

of his life, that a selection would become impossible unless the gaps were filled by a carefully thought out exposition, thus composing an anthology on æsthetic grounds and foregoing as little as it is feasible of the help that specialized learning can provide.

The account and the extracts in the *Manuale della letteratura italiana,* by D'Ancona e Bacci, are, on the whole, excellent; the extracts adequately exemplifying the finest passages in the *Commedia* and the connecting remarks being so worded as to help an intelligent reader to bear in mind the grandeur of the general structure, while he admires the finish and power of some section or episode. It is, of course, possible to be moved by the account of Ugolino's death even without knowing what comes before and what follows; but, by reading enough of the *Commedia* as to understand why Ugolino is placed in that particular section of Hell, and what function that episode has in the general scheme of the *Inferno,* those few lines acquire an immensely greater significance. If enough is remembered of the incidents of Dante's life to appreciate his motives in composing that passage further light will be shed on it. Thus, the conclusion must be: "Read as much of Dante as you can, but, however little you read, read it well." Dante possessed so intense a personality that he demands an intensive study from his readers.

Ultimately the choice of the best passages must rest on individual taste. The perusal of a translation, be it in verse or in prose, may help to get at the general lines of the picture, but only by grappling with the

original, by reading its lines over and over again, and by reading them aloud, is it possible for their meaning—that is to say, for Dante's message—to reach us. As for Dante's works, other than the *Commedia,* there are passages in the *Vita Nuova* (*e.g.,* ch. 19-24), in the *Convivio* (Bk. I.), and lyrics among the *Rime* (some of the poems for the Pietra) that could scarcely be overlooked. To read separate chapters out of the *Monarchia* would hardly be profitable; but the perusal of Dante's second *eclogue* and of his letters to the rulers of Italy (*Ep.* v.) and to a Florentine friend (*Ep.* ix.) would be helpful to readers who wish to gain some insight into Dante's character.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

No attempt can be made here at a survey of the vast bibliography, but a valuable selection may be read in Professor E. G. Gardner's excellent Primer (*Dante*, Dent, 1923), and particular points are illustrated in P. Toynbee's *Dante Alighieri, his Life and Works* (fourth ed., London, 1910). Of permanent importance are N. Zingarelli's *Dante* (Milan, 1903), and the specialized periodical publications, *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana* (continued by M. Barbi's *Studi danteschi*), and *Giornale Dantesco*. The critical text of the complete works is to be read in *Le Opere di Dante, testo critico della Società dantesca Italiana* (Florence, 1921), and, with some modifications, in *Le Opere di Dante Alighieri* (fourth ed., Oxford, 1923). Up-to-date notes to the *Commedia* are to be found in the editions by F. Torraca (third ed., Milan and Rome, 1915), Scartazzini-Vandelli (Milan, 1914), and Casini-S. A. Barbi (Florence, 1923). All the works have been published with notes and prose translations in "The Temple Classics" (Dent, London), and some renderings in the text are based on, and occasionally adapted from, this version. Reference should also be made to P. Toynbee, *Dantis Alagherii Epistolæ* (text, introduction, notes, and translations, Oxford, 1920), and to the verse rendering of the *Rime* in Lorna de Lucchi's *Minor Poems of Dante* (Oxford, 1926).

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